

Duxbury loses a good friend

Ruth Rowley dies at 90; was a selectman and town advocate

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Rowley

1974 to 1977 and was involved with many local and national political campaigns, including former governor Mike

Dukakis' run for president and Gerry Studds Congressional campaign.

continued on page 6

continued from page one

Peter and Joan Baker first met Rowley when they moved to town, through the anti-Vietnam War movement.

"We knew her through the political environment and we became friends," Peter Baker said. "For many many years we watched the 4th of July parade from the front of her house."

Despite her political leanings (she worked on many Democratic campaigns) Rowley told the Bakers she always listed herself in the town census as "citizen" — something that impressed the couple.

"She was the penultimate citizen in the town," he said. "She encouraged people to participate in the political process."

Encouraging participation was a hallmark of Rowley's time in Duxbury, and she specifically targeted younger people, offering support to those running for office and urging others to get involved.

"She was such a strong leader, she had such a following and a network of people who really looked up to her for guidance," said Planning Board Chairwoman Amy MacNab.

Rowley was a supporter of MacNab during her first run for the Planning Board (she was initially appointed to fill a vacancy and then ran for the seat.)

"Unbeknownst to me, she was my biggest champion," MacNab said.

Nancy Landgren got a phone call from Rowley after she presented a petition at Town Meeting. Later, they worked together on various political campaigns.

"She always was so willing to share her expertise, her experience, her knowledge," Landgren said. "She was so encouraging, so supportive ... she was just a great person to have in the town."

"She had historical knowledge that ... it is just tragic to lose that because I don't know anyone who had the political historic knowledge that she did."

— Amy MacNab

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Ruth Rowley remembered as a champion of Duxbury

MacNab, who called Rowley a "mentor," said one of Rowley's favorite phrases was "raising the question." She remembers a woman who never stopped asking questions when it came to important town issues.

"She'd always say, 'Amy, you don't have to take a position, just raise the question,'" MacNab said. "She wouldn't so much say this is what I think and this is what you should do ... she was hoping people would think about it and put

the time and knowledge into it."

"She would always tell me the voters in this town are smart," MacNab added. "If you make the information available to people they generally do the right thing."

Others also remembered Rowley's diligent approach to gathering the facts on every issue.

"She studied things. She didn't speak without being informed first," Baker said.

Town Manager Richard MacDonald said that Rowley's constant questioning kept town officials "on their toes."

"There was no more dedicated individual for the betterment of Duxbury than Ruth Rowley," MacDonald said.

Baker said that Rowley was mindful of holding the boards and committees in town to their stated responsibilities.

"She expected the committees and organizations within the town to live up to their policies and procedures ... she

would call them to task if she thought they weren't living up to it," he said.

Despite her tenacity, Rowley was willing to look even at herself with a critical eye. Landgren, a member of the First Parish Church, remembers Rowley telling her that she and her husband initially approached the church upon moving to Duxbury, but were put off by a rule that required the congregation to "vote in" new members.

"They didn't allow themselves to back off even though the church changed the rule," Landgren said. "She felt they were the losers for it."

Rowley then told her that she regretted her rigid stance, and gave the younger woman some advice.

"When you make a stand, no matter what's behind it, you might want to make sure you're not burning bridges because you might regret it later on," Rowley told Landgren. "I thought that was wise advice, especially in a small town. I think that's one of her greatest strengths. She was a very thoughtful person, and very caring."

MacNab said that Rowley's death is a loss for the

town, because of her vast institutional knowledge.

"She had historical knowl-

edge that ... it is just tragic to lose because I don't know anyone who had the political historic knowledge that she did," she said. "She could tell you the intent behind things that were passed at Town Meeting years ago. Now that's forever lost, we're going to miss her."

Toward the end of her life, Rowley was at the Bay Path Nursing Home. There, she reconnected with Baker, who was visiting his wife's mother.

"She was still actively involved and aware of the political process," he said, adding that he had a good conversation with her around the 4th of July.

"I got to tell her that she was one of my heroes," he said. "She was always active ... ideally she was the kind of citizen we should all be."

A memorial service with reception following will be held Saturday, July 30 at 10 a.m. at the First Parish Church.

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— Peter Baker